

SONNETS FOR CHOICE



MRS. ALDRICH

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SONNETS FOR CHOICE

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BY

MARGARET CHANLER ALDRICH

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TO
MRS. JULIA WARD HOWE

Elder serene, within whose heart of grace
Wide kindred build an altar to our race,
Now, through the vaulted splendours of thy mind,
My fledgling verse a halting way would wind.

Rokeby, 1910

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE POET	3
JANUARY	4
IN FEBRUARY	5
MARCH	6
SPRING	7
MY NEIGHBOUR'S WINDMILL	8
THE HORSE-CHESTNUT	9
IN JULY	10
HAYING	11
ON A PICNIC	12
THE MOON	13
IN PENOBSCOT BAY	14
HOSPITALITY	15
A YELLOW AUTUMN	16
IN OCTOBER	17
IN WINTER	18
THE MYSTICS	19
FAITH	20
I AM	21
THE LAMBS	22
FORGIVENESS	23
AUTHORITY	24
IN THE MAMERTINE	25

CONTENTS

	PAGE
ON THE PALATINE	26
AGATHA	27
WORLDLINESS	28
ACHIEVEMENT	29
PASTEUR	30
TO MILTON, TEACHER	31
SHELLEY	32
THE PERFECT MAN	33
THE SEA TO ALEXANDER AGASSIZ	34
THE EAST	35
NIK-KO: I	36
NIK-KO: II	37
NIK-KO: III	38
VENICE	39
LOVE	40
LOVE'S MASQUE	41
LOVE'S TEST	42
AFTER DREAMING	43
"HE ALSO WEARING FLOWERS OF SICILY"	44
TO AN IMPROVISATORE	45
AT A CONCERT	46
INSPIRATION	47
ON TOO SMALL AN ANTHOLOGY	48
LANGUAGE	49
ANTICIPATION	50
ASTRONOMY A.D. 1907	51
SILENCE	52

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

THE POET

TO dwell with wisdom at each hidden source
Till hastiest speech bears a divine impress,
To raise an image breathing loveliness
From words long levelled to a common course :
This is to fathom the abiding force
Within the numbered seas of sound, to express
For nature, not for art, the varied stress
By which her heart hath pulsed forth intercourse.

All thought, all feeling, can be traced in sound
By him who hearkens yielding to the spell
And meekly echoing what he hath heard.
But let him not within his verse be found,
Lest the song grow confused, as when a shell
Is moaning dumbly ocean's mighty word.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

JANUARY

ALONG the cross-roads drifted snow lies deep;
No nearer traveller than the moon has tried
To gain the turnpike from the windward side,
And over buried fences she can sweep
Unbroken shadows. In warm cedars creep
The ruffled snowbirds, happy to abide
'Mid clustered berries blue and orange pied;
Out from old knotholes wary squirrels peep.

No sound, no step, until a cutter turns
With bells and laughter plunging through the drifts;
Two lovers, tempted by the silent space,
Break their first track together. Patient lifts
Their horse his feet before them pace by pace,
And, looking back, each with the omen burns.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

IN FEBRUARY

AGAIN departing Winter hastens Spring;
Her lengthened days are here with softened air,
Her flashing twigs, and birds who brave the glare
Of suns not veiled by leafy sheltering.
I catch new rhythm from out the shattering
Of icy banks, from heaving meadows bare,
From sappy droppings to the quickened mere,
From oozing hurried into murmuring.

Not yet her stores, her miracles unmask;
Only by all she loosens and sets free
Can we remember what Spring holds for earth.
Before she bears the year 'tis hers to ask
Much to depart, aye, and that joyously,
Tuned to the pulses of approaching birth.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

MARCH

THIS is the month of bareness; washed and swept
The hillsides glisten and the hollows lie
In upturned barrenness. The sun, with high
And eager winds, through rockbound woods has leapt,
Searching snow caches which have quickly wept
Away before him. Should the young shoots try
To clothe the fields of March, they too must die.
This is the fast when emptiness is kept.

So is it in our lives when light and air
Parch and disperse what they have warmed and cooled.
So is it when our hearts, left stark and bare
For a strange season of unfruitfulness,
Show bravely in their unsought nakedness
The furrow which an absent hand hath ruled.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

SPRING

✓
WHEN shad-tree blossoms flutter on the air
Caught in a breeze as fragile as are they,
When liverwort hath starred the stoniest way,
The poetry of Spring is everywhere.
It dances up the hillside furrow's stair,
It beckons thrushes to the topmost spray;
Even the turtle sees 'twixt night and day,
And in a pond'rous metre leaves his lair.

For motion is the poetry of Spring.
To other seasons rest and fruitfulness.
Now every pulse beneath a dart of light
Moves and is glad. Now through the smallest thing
Is life transmitted with a radiant stress.
The smile of Spring is motion infinite.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

MY NEIGHBOUR'S WINDMILL

THE river washes past the marshy brake;
Beneath the isle of meadows streams have found
A way to meet with rocky springs and slake
Primæval tangles. Moisture to the ground
Gives bubbling loams; softly smooth pastures quake;
The waving cinctures, made by vines unbound,
About the groves their breezy pleasures take,
While reeds and water ply melodious sound.
Green, all is green for centuries, then lush
The lilies rise, fair plangent colours blow,
And fragrance sweet. The watery acres flush
A garden riotous, and in the glow,
Stemming the tide, a young magician stands,—
The winds from Shattamuck his airy wands.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

THE HORSE-CHESTNUT

THE flowering chestnut whitens into bloom,
And to and fro a ministry of bees
Moves heavily, embossing pageantries
Of golden life upon a bridal loom.
Up to no other forest tree they come;
Honey of fruit their pirate argosies
Amerce, and all sweet garden industries
Equip where their rich wings are pressed for room.

What tincture brings them to the chestnut's gall?
When orchards ripen, and the graceless burrs
In unattended forests offer food
To man and beast, from these a stone must fall.
Let blending science, like a warm bee, brood,
And say what nurture at her calling stirs.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

IN JULY

ALL day the wind has reached us from the South,
An inshore breeze advancing like a tide,
And like a tide covering the country-side
With its own nature. From the river's mouth
Come salty levels where the hot corn's drouth
Laps at their dampness, and the meadows dried
Before the haying softly breathe. There cried
A wood-dove: "Rain, rain cometh from the South."

O cloud, desired by all whom thou didst pass,
Are we thy goal? Thy wayward tent of gloom
Hath drifted up o'er many aching farms.
Are we to catch the fire of thine alarms?
Thou answer'st me with thunder's shatt'ring boom
And sheeted water beating thirsty grass.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

HAYING

LONG fragrant lines beneath the reapers sway
And fall as though in gentle sacrifice
To suns beneficent. The wafted spice
Rises until high heaven is in the hay,
Till distant townsmen on their pavement say:
“ Now the wide mow is laden with the price
Of all our scheming, still the fond device
Of Nature feeds the world in the old way.”

And on the fields where cradles have descried
The order of her progress, where the cocks,
Like hives of sweetness, for her coming wait,
Passes the mighty wain of Harvest's state.
Now all hands sweep the last load to her side,
Which up to beam and roof-tree proudly rocks.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

ON A PICNIC

READ from a page where rhymes at leisure lie;
Let neither sound nor meaning harness verse
To animation sped by the rhythms terse
Of battle numbers. With slow measure ply
Th' unwinding of our musing's treasure. By
This still, cool river all our minds immerse
In pastorals, to energy averse,
Whose wistful maids and shepherds "Pleasure" cry.

Led by the piping passionate of these
Far-off musicians, we drift into years
Whose heat, whether from sun or temperament,
Is long accomplished. Late above the trees
The moon in greater magic softly steers,
Closing our dreams, our day, with wonderment.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

THE MOON

EVEN the wind which stirs our fragrant air
Drifts toward the sovereign coming of the moon.
Thou dawning-of-men's-dreams art rising soon
This summer night when love is everywhere.
All men await thee: some on fragile stair,
Struck between saplings, some where shallows croon.
Over the oceans which thy light hath strewn
The dreamers of adventure broadly fare.

Why art thou sovereign to the human heart?
What life, what death, falls to us in thy beam?
Why do our spirits to thy heights remove?
It is because thou canst not wake, but art
The world of sleep, and so, oh Moon! of love,
Which is to man a sweet, effulgent dream.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

IN PENOBSCOT BAY

SAILS on the sea, and on the meadow sails.
Bright butterflies, a mimic fleet and swift,
Above ripe salty grasses dip and drift
To vanish in the balsam-scented trails.
More slowly, where the dim horizon veils
Her flapping canvas, comes through clinging mist
A lazy Indiaman, who all the year can lift
Her wings to palm-fringed ports whence spice exhales.

She brings our summer hint of rest unknown
From islands where the sun unheeded streams,
To us who husband every blossom blown.
She moves in gliding ease through sunset clouds;
Upon her decks are phantoms and day-dreams;
When she departs our youths are in her shrouds.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

HOSPITALITY

A BIRD of passage flutters through the corn;
Unwonted is its note and flashing breast,
A stranger to the branching groves where nest
The ministries familiar. Wert thou borne
From flocks migrating this September morn
By wayward winds on mountains in the West?
Here must thou, in a balmier air opprest,
Fly sadly, crying softly, and forlorn?

Hither to die thou cam'st; fatality
Of death approaching made thy warbling yearn.
Bereft of flight and song, unto my mind
Enhanced by thy dependence, fallen, I find
Thee beautiful and still upon a fern,—
A handful claiming hospitality.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

A YELLOW AUTUMN

A SUMMER'S green has fired into fine gold.
Each lambent tree gives light unto the sky.
Though smooth gray mists around the forest lie,
Within, effulgence gleams on ev'ry mould.
Beneath coined leaves all avenues are stoled;
Down patterns many a birchen treasury
With the crisp brilliance of the hickory,
And here an oak has loosed his sterner hold.

Bright, shadowy, or burnished like strong ore,
Pale with long shining, never two the same,
The trees this gleaming curtain raise between
Summer and winter. Their content they pour
In a last pageant, when across the scene
Steps hunter man, afoot for feathered game.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

IN OCTOBER

THE sunbeam of an early autumn eve
Strikes past my eye and hovers on the shelves
Tooled with a dimmer gold, then lower delves
An instant in the children's curls, to leave
The last light there. Soon we are dark. Reprieve
Touches our hands and eyes. The restless elves,
Dropping their games, have softly ranged themselves
For such a story as the hour conceives.

This is th' unseeing time when all the blind
Commune with us an instant. Eyeless things
Meet with our sightlessness. Afar the mind
Together leads us, quickened by a breath
Which fears not tales of darkness or of death.
Now clear, now soft, a rapt piano sings.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

IN WINTER

A VISION of the Spring delights mine eyes.
Above, in nearer sequence to the sun,
I see unfrosted lands, quick rivers run
Rippling with light and warm with ecstasies.
Look up! Within this garden of the skies
Taste the soft airs and gather, one by one,
Bright flowers blown where Winter hath not spun
An icy mesh, where no white snowflake dies.

Thou didst not know that in the sun's wide wake
Such gardens hung, enchanted and serene,
Uncalendared upon this seasoned earth?
Look up! as children watch a bubble's birth;
For many a glittering paradise is seen
By one on whom a fleeting light doth break.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

THE MYSTICS

THEIR love distils the mind of God. They trace
His presence throughout earth's dissolving airs,
Weaving what whosoever follows, shares,—
The faithful outline of His vast embrace.
No sound too faint for them to interlace
The voice of light. The rune of ancient prayers,
To such inspiring confidence, declares
In filmy clues the wisdom of our race.

From their tried hands raised in devotion's wreath
The fires of life descend on all beneath,
And men enclosed within the truth revealed,
Although they neither see nor feel the light,
Are of some blinding torment softly healed,
While unawares the Mystic prays for might.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

FAITH

FAITH, with discerning eyes and answering heart,
Stands steadfast in our midst, prophet upright
Of the Invisible. We watch her smite
The closing clouds asunder. "Yea, thou art
And naught shall longer intervene, as part
To part must draw I wait thee." Slow in sight
To those who listen gazing, cohorts bright
Approach, and lo! earth's altar fires start.

But when great spirits pass within our ken,
Or truths are written large which Faith first spelled,
By them towards the Unknown beyond impelled,
Further her arc of vision rests again.
One God; lives sweet with love, Faith hath beheld;
Even now she hales us peace and deathless men.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

I AM

SOMEWHERE within him each man born hath heard
The voice of God saying: "Behold, I AM."
Whether to us the great assurance came
Or we have caught the echo of a word
Vouchsafed another, always there is stirred
Desire to be, and each repeats, "I AM."
Then even from him floats forth his Maker's name,
Who in self-love the Maker's image blurred.

O cry of being, mighty antiphone!
Since Moses, clothed in meekness, from the flame
On Horeb turned to lead his nation, thou
Hast never ceased to thunder unison
'Twixt God unseen and man, crying to know
Who sends him forth: who but the great I AM?

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

THE LAMBS

THE altars of retreating worlds you blenched.
Long years are white with multitudes of flocks
Passing to sacrifice. Your legend locks
Itself in every tongue of man. Intrenched
In deepest tenderness, gold has not wrenched
The palm of preciousness. Each yearling knocks
A fresh advent of Spring. Naming you rocks
A child to dreams wherein her tears are quenched.

Children, the Spring, tenderness, purity,
The lambs wind upward past obscurity
Of earthly emblems till celestial light
Shepherds their pasture. In their fold has trod
The living Christ: down from supremest height
Comes our command, Behold the Lamb of God.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

FORGIVENESS

I SAW Christ waiting where a sin had stood,
Made manifest in answer to the prayer
Of one who wished all consequence to bear
Arising from his acts which were not good.
And this, the Truth, I dimly understood.
None can forgive himself, we must declare
Each other free. Forgiveness is the stair
By which to climb from hate to brotherhood.

When men whom I have injured still resent,
And so perpetuate my wickedness,
Christ, to whom all relations are revealed,
Can take their place toward me, if I repent,
Until they learn that all forgivings bless
The world in evil consequence repealed.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

AUTHORITY

MISTRESS of all within the heart enthroned,
To God or sin thou art obedient,
Being thyself the meek embodiment
Of each man's passion, honored or disowned.
Where power claims thee patient faith is stoned
And helplessness defrauded. Well content,
The guilty seek Authority's consent
By their reflection to themselves condoned.

Then let us husband generous holiness,
Worshipping goodness, since we must appeal
Unto our own most cherished quality.
The best God has made clear we may reveal,
His law emerging through our earthliness
Until we image his Authority.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

IN THE MAMERTINE

WHILE blood and fire, entering through the eyes,
Remain to steep and burn remotest dreams,
The violence which with creation teems
Accomplishes what its intent denies,
To faith and love essential victories.
All you will know of me when these drawn streams
Are dry, is that I worship Christ: so gleams
His Name through me among your memories.

'Tis thus we conquer, silent and dispersed,
One human mind invaded by each death
Embraced for Christ. The murderer witnesseth
The prayers invoked for him by severing hands,
Which, stranger than a Cæsar's crass commands,
Persist among the voices which have cursed.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

ON THE PALATINE

A GHOSTLY ministrant, this martyr rives
My consciousness. His words left me content,
I cared not what his resurrection meant.
But now its startling import slowly drives
Through recollection, and my heart conceives
Gladly the hope that past and present, blent,
Are only parted by the dark descent
Of death. So every Christian slave believes.

By bringing resurrection unto mind
These martyrs best disclose the mean domains
Of dissolution. What a grave contains
Is earth's or mine: but whose this wingéd seed
Which past destruction makes desire to speed
Toward worlds where each is happy with his kind?

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

AGATHA

HER chiselled mind holds niches of high thought
Veiled like her eyes, as though the spirit host,
Not man, purveys their light. An outer post
Of heaven her selfless life; a balmy port
For many to whom God and heaven are naught,
Who see not Christ, in whom her sins are lost.
Safe from impoverishment she tenders most
To these, too starved in soul to bring her aught.

Beyond the stars her mind and soul commune;
But her sweet heart hath fluttered in the hand
Of every sorrow, every joyous boon.
Careless of all but love, she doth frequent
The gates of life: Alas! these open stand,
She may pass through them on some mercy bent.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

WORLDLINESS

YOU move alone, lovely beyond belief,
But lives are in your train with vast arrears.
Now you have greeted me and gone, appears
How spectral is your splendour, and how brief;
For admiration with a shining sheaf
Of conquests, gleaned from hoarse applauding years,
Is shadowed by wronged love whose urn of tears
Waters with with'ring salt each filchéd leaf.

Strange exiled woman, powerless to hold
Yourself from calculation,—to its low
And sordid pulse your blood is running slow.
What is your beauty, where perfection's part,
If thus consenting you through life can go
Without the sanctuary of a heart?

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

ACHIEVEMENT

SWEET are the hours, and of unearthly might,
Lying betwixt two great activities.
Here Nature stores the rare capacities
Of rest and compensation. Here insight
Is first vouchsafed of an impending height
Whose outline in the subtle shadow lies
Cast by Achievement. "Thither" the soul cries,
And toward undreamed of sequence bends her flight.

Gladly she ceased from toil, thinking to know
Conclusion's respite. Purpose, far beneath,
Flashing immensities, strikes THEN on NOW.
Quickly delivered from the little death
Of holding aught as finished, hours like these
Dawn on endurance in the clasp of ease.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

PASTEUR

DEATH enters through the infinitely small.
The unseen and the disregarded hold
Her charnel secrets in a fertile mould,
Until the infinitely patient call
Them forth with faith which magnifieth all.
Patience descries how Death is waxéd bold,
How Life herself, by Ignorance controlled,
Worketh the widening of destruction's thrall.

Chief son of patience stands Pasteur, the good,
So vowed to life that under hideous forms
He knew her beauty and proclaimed its norms.
He drew the sting from fang of maddened brute,
Gave purple vintage to the paling fruit,
And rest, safe rest, to fevered motherhood.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

TO MILTON, TEACHER

LEARNED in the mind of Greece, and with a soul
Mettled to lead men far against their creeds,
How school thy will to meet the pettish deeds
Of youths who falter careless of the goal?
Thou taughtest nephews orphaned, when the whole
Of Europe was to tremble 'neath thy screeds.
Thou hadst the eye compassionate when feeds
The sparrow, though it mark the planets' roll.

Day after day small theorems to scan,
False quantities in tongues thy stately art
Could bend to living speech, nor was this all:
What if thou wakedst, having been with Pan?
The lyric of the morn must wait or fall
Into the text of a school-master's part.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

SHELLEY

A MORTAL singer, thou alone hast played
Supernal themes with so resolved a stroke,
The wind through echoing them to praise awoke,
And many lived who were no more afraid.
The challenge of thy piercing fancy made
The heart of Nature thine, but thy sweet yoke
Of hon'ring song a brooding worship spoke
Which Beauty safe from desecration laid.

Less man to thee than flying shapes untaught,
And least rapt Virtue, her abounding shrine
Where homeliest things are steeped in sacred wine,
Ignored defiance. Now her children read
Thee victim of a piety which thought
God further from His works than from their creed.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

THE PERFECT MAN

SPRING forth, O perfect man, into the light!
Long wooed by poets and by faith descried,
Why in the realm of words dost thou abide,
Why phantomlike elude life's checkered span?
Oft has it seemed thy tide toward us ran,
When with us briefly dwelt our loftiest pride,
A beauteous child who, scarcely sickening, died,
As though maturity exhaled a ban.

Thine is the earth, not ours; we, seizing part,
Do hurt the whole. Perfection, wishing all,
May all possess. Perchance thine hour is here;
Wilt thou come singly, as a god draws near,
Or is the Perfect Man a nation's heart?
Where rides an army will thy bugles call?

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

THE SEA TO ALEXANDER AGASSIZ

UPON my breast the Faithful cast their sin,
Yet plunge their children in my healing tide.
I purge the past because all futures glide
Toward the land when waves and ships come in.
From filmy motes, which idly shine and spin,
To caverned whales with offspring at their side,
The lives of earth are mine; light kingdoms ride
Palm-crested where my coral workers win.

Once in solution did I hold the earth,
And slowly have I let the islands go,
And slowly will I take them back once more.
I have receded until man should know
He, too, is of the waters in his birth
And doth stand upright on an ocean's floor.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

THE EAST

A CHILD sat by me who would find the East,
Upon a little map, and learn its tale.
Before my task knowledge and surmise fail:
Where and of what confinement is the East?
An ounce of fragrance from her mystic yeast
Gave many a populace a martyr's grail.
Most potent was her essence to entail
Renown on magus, surgeon or priest.

While in the scholar's universe one thought
Embalmed by Eastern tongues, though it pay toll
In twenty Western minds, is never less;
While fragments speak her an intrinsic whole;
While every man who prays the East has taught,
Conquest and chart her bourne cannot confess.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

NIK-KO: I

WHAT noble trees, what vast and stately groves
Are these which with solemnity prevail
Until it dwells at Nik-ko? It behooves
The pilgrim, moving shrouded in your veil
Of deep and reverence-compelling shade,
O gentle cryptomerias, to own
The balmy charity which your dim aid
A cloak upon his weariness has thrown.
Toil-marked and travel-stained, slowly to pace
Between your rows whose ancientness
Makes nothing of one life—in such a place
All is renewed to calm and quietness.
Nik-ko! Your groves no traveller leaves behind,
They shade the distance of each grateful mind.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

NIK-KO: II

HERE not an acre, but a mountain-side
To Holiness and Peace are dedicate:
The waterfalls, the river's rushing tide,
A valley and its hills all consecrate.
Would you see Nik-ko? 'Tis a holy land,
Meet for long sojourn. Like the saints of old,
Who thought strong walls of paradise did stand
In every sunset cloud, so we are told
That Nik-ko is not common earth, but lies
In its rare beauty for the Buddhists' good.
From far they come and feast their faithful eyes
With its nobility. When one hath stood
Upon Chuzenze's mountain, he hath been
Nearer to heaven than the dead have seen.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

NIK-KO: III

UPON the hillside long majestic stairs
Lead us to courts where princes have been laid
To rest. Here bells and gongs with sombre airs
Announce the holy doors. Strange feet are stayed
Upon the threshold, but your eyes may see
The molten glory of the inner space,
The soaring dragons on a golden sea,
The carven lotus blooming with the grace
Of living fragrance. To successive fanes
The guardian leading, here and there the tone
Of priest, for pilgrim praying, sounds the strains
Of earthly weakness; but o'er all is thrown
So great a beauty supernatural
The stars in heav'n could worship and not fall.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

VENICE

NOW thundering an advent on my walls,
Now pleading as a prisoner for release,
Now sibilant of travel and surcease,
The tide of my dominion sweeps and falls.
Vacant the silent splendour of my halls;
Shrouded in dreams of conquest and increase
The dead Venetians lie, sealed unto peace
From which no rival resurrection calls.

But these my populations wide and free,
These night-long voices sounding my desires,
These leaping mirrors to the sun's bright fires,
Unwearied in their passing to and fro,
Bearing the unseen winds they come and go:
The ceaseless, countless footsteps of the sea.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

LOVE

✓
AROUND our world is drawn the cord of love;
From whence or wherefore none do understand,
Nor can men weave the palpitating strand,
Since none have found an end or break thereof.
Sometimes in arching starry loops above,
Sometimes coiled close, a life-destroying band,
Most dear when shut within a small child's hand,
Love takes or leaves us as it finds a groove.

Love hath both depth and height; we have seen those
Who writhe forever in consuming throes,
And we have seen the Blessed stand in flame
Which, entering them, shot forth a beauteous light,
Making the world of shadows gleaming white.
These last it is who give all love one name.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

LOVE'S MASQUE

DANCING it overwhelmed my youth and out
Again, with melody and rhythm, then fled,
I dancing on, content. The years have sped,
Off'ring to all men the same blinding rout.
An hundred quick'ning measures twine about
The hearts which shadow mine. Over the dead
Sweet songs of mindfulness are nightly said,
And to high chorals the young, marching, shout.

Who are the mystic train? Whose feet, what song,
Through time unchallenged every sense may move
To hallow service? What the measure breathed
Which like a smile upon our lives is wreathed?
“Behold,” they said, “we are all those whom Love
Hath need of: he hath marked your cadence long.”

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

LOVE'S TEST

MY song is briefer than a summer's day,
Clipped at both ends by your not hearing it.
Each stave, disjointed as a blind man's way,
Halts before sense and stumbles over wit.
I fondly echo strains which you have heard,
So doth your soul inform monotony.
Within your name I find a cryptic word
Which to my life is strangest alchemy.
Oft have I loved, but never have I been
As now, a moon to one high, moving star
Whose satellite by her is never seen,
While in her light he travels long and far.

Yet, more than worship, give I mortal love,
Since to myself this star I would remove.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

AFTER DREAMING

THOU hast been with me once again in dreams,
Those fastnesses unscaled by Time or Death,
Those treasures where night depositeth
The coin which our day-time loss redeems.
Such brief presentment of existence seems
Half torture when the loved one vanisheth,
But wholly joy when back he wandereth,
With voice and smile where recognition gleams.

Thou hast been with me once again; from whence
Our hearts, our minds approached, we cannot tell.
Perchance to every dream a different road,
Else should we make of one a sweet abode.
I wake, and we have been together: hence
Flies spectred Separation to his hell.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

“ HE ALSO WEARING FLOWERS OF SICILY ”

WHAT crowns thee best in hours of fond acclaim?
I see soft-scented chaplets at thy feet
Fall till each step is wreathed. Some vineyard sweet
Hath stripped the vintage of its shade. Whence came
These petals, if no garden is aflame
With thy report? What mellow herbs discreet
Have crushed their leaves of healing, to repeat
Upon the air thy life-potential name?

Aloof thy spirit from the praise confused,
Unclaimed thy ghost by all this day can bring;
But on thy heart a book, and pressed between
The words, which were our friends when men abused,
Rest violets we gathered wandering
Long before nations had discerned thy mien.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

TO AN IMPROVISATORE

LET me hear music when thy soft voice breathes
A poem on the breathless summer's night.
Our minds below th' horizon with the light
Perchance toil yet; but here the spirit sheathes
Itself in rest, and round the spirit wreathes
Music, such dreams as make stern thought take fright.
Call golden numbers down; beneath their flight
The plodding heart with youthful rapture seethes.

The Kings have spices poured from many a jar
Which, in their falling, oft reminded me
Of noble, learned poems, filling far
Both ear and air with riches. But one rose
Makes countless slaves by perfume each man knows.
A rose, Enchantress, let thy poem be.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

AT A CONCERT

PLAY to us, for the heart of music stirs
Similitude which, like possession, bears
The fruit of earthly joy. In her wake fares
Man's spirit, singing what his soul avers:
That she is his, and he supremely hers.
Play to us lofty, superhuman shares
Of concrete sound, and clustering pliant airs
From space where filmy life with life concurs.

Make us enduring harmonies receive,
Lead us to arches of the universe,
Spans undisturbed which traverse human brains
As light cleaves water, leaving it alive.
Mind, heart and sense in melody immerse,
Until through them high heavenly order reigns.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

INSPIRATION

I KNOW not what my eager hand should write;
To an unspoken will I feel it curve,
A servant greater than my thoughts deserve.
Through me unbidden crowd the lines to-night.
Are there, then, unlaïd dead who stoop to trite
And godless jargon? Or must I preserve
Some fragmentary memories which swerve
Aside from Truth, mere shadows of her might?

Not knowing what I am, how can I tell
To which veiled power a strange sentinel,
Words by my tongue and fingers come to be.
Only by what is written can I guess
When I have echoed wandering emptiness,
And when the passing of life's mastery.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

ON TOO SMALL AN ANTHOLOGY

HOW can we name the poems we love best?
How bind within one little volume's lore
Those gleaming treasures which do move us more
Than garnered lives to heav'n's reward addressed?
Wide lights which show us ages stretched at rest,
Strong music which the poets ever pour
Into the hours of silence,—can we store
Their perfect singing between east and west?

How ill they fare together, clipped and seamed
Into a tiny sheaf, which should have teemed
With one great name and all he said to earth.
Three verses out of Omar: this is mirth,
And 'tis his laughter answers, "Let him be
Whose measure is a trite anthology."

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

LANGUAGE

WE cannot tell what word will catch the light
And hold it as warm amber holds the sea.
From hand to hand we pass the sleeping sprite
Not knowing which a brooding nurse could be ;
Through sound and number we pursue the flight
Of thought and image, till our senses drown
In medleys beauteous of songs and sight.
But all we seize is to confusion grown,
Timid and chill. We wake with alien night.
Yet words there are seeking their master hand,
Live things with gaits responsive to his might,
Moving with him a clear, spontaneous band.
To these men listen, wishing they were words
To whom a poet could bring blest accords.

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

ANTICIPATION

IF I could share the vision of the stars
And gaze down endless shafts of vivid light,
I would not look on earth's insensate wars,
While the surrounding heavens in peace are bright.
Searching for life among the spinning moons,
Or for its source in their controlling suns,
Man's isolation and the petty boons
His heart demands ring idle as his guns.
The splendid darkness of the Universe,
Those worlds which met extinction in their course
To hang obedient without futile curse,
Leave human systems ignorant of force.

Sublimity around us shines and dies;
When shall we compass her profundities?

SONNETS FOR CHOICE

ASTRONOMY A.D. 1907

YET owing nothing to the human will
Do you remain: no trembling star hath known
Obedience to mortal mind. Alone
Amid created hosts you, Sovereigns still,
Arise and perish without man. While ill,
And good life, death, flame, cloud, wind, wave, and stone
The earth-born mind hath harnessed, soft have shone
Unnumbered worlds remote from fault or skill.

If swiftly now caught up by light we run,
If through the portals of inflaméd Mars
Gaze on the measure of each tireless stride
Across immensity, what spirit need deride
The dream of man's dominion over stars,
His coming to the dayspring of his sun?



SONNETS FOR CHOICE

SILENCE

SOME thoughts are clear to us, although estranged
From the familiar channels of our speech.
No haunting phrases their deep meaning teach,
The vaster orbit of their light is ranged
Beyond the nether air we have deranged
With clam'rous voices. When their swift rays reach
Our world of sound and shadows, they impeach
Its unrealities and leave them changed.

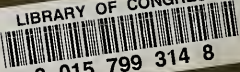
Too far such thoughts, too cold for you and me?
Nay, through a child's true mind, the deepest well
God gives our thirst, we watch their progress free.
And oftentimes a poet's minstrelsy
Within a limpid mirror can compel,
Untold, the Image of Infinity.



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